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RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 1607
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J2 MIAMI FL PRIORITY
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J5 MIAMI FL PRIORITY
RUEHCV/USDAO CARACAS VE PRIORITY

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SUBJECT: BARBADOS: SUSTAINABILITY WORKSHOP ON HIV/AIDS IN
THE WORKPLACE

REF: 04 BRIDGETOWN 2396

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: On January 29-30, the U.S. Department of Labor-International Labor Organization's HIV/AIDS Workplace Program hosted a sustainability workshop, which focused on developing a strategy for carrying forward the Program's mission after the Program officially concludes in December 2007. With over fifty government, private sector, labor, and NGO participants, the workshop provided a good opportunity to review progress to date, discuss best practices, and reach agreement on a sustainability plan for 2007 and beyond. Unfortunately, the workshop also demonstrated some weaknesses in Barbados' fight against HIV/AIDS. End Summary.

MAKING PROGRESS SUSTAINABLE

¶2. (U) The U.S. Department of Labor-International Labor Organization's HIV/AIDS Workplace Education Program, which was launched in Barbados in 2004 (reftel), organized a "sustainability workshop" on January 29-30. The three-year Program is scheduled to end in December 2007, and the organizers' objective, as suggested by the workshop's theme "Finding the Anchors," was to reach an agreement on and mobilize support for carrying forward the Program's efforts. Over fifty government, private sector, labor, and NGO representatives attended the workshop. The two-day workshop included presentations on progress to date, case studies on best practices, and working group sessions on various aspects of the HIV/AIDS effort, such as tripartite collaboration, enterprise work, informal economy, and the role of mass media. At the conclusion, the workshop brought together a high-level panel that included U.S. Ambassador Mary Ourisman, AIDS Foundation President Colin Brewer, President of the Congress of Trade Unions and Staff Associations Sir Roy Trotman, and the President of the Barbados Employers' Confederation Dr. Hensley Sobers.

¶3. (U) The workshop resulted in a general agreement on a "Sustainability Plan" to maximize the impact of the Workplace Education Program in its last year and beyond. The workshop participants agreed that the Sustainability Plan must have a national scope, incorporate tripartite participation, include timelines and benchmarks, and be coordinated with Barbados' National HIV/AIDS Commission. The participants also envisioned creating a small coordinating body to carry

forward the Sustainability Plan after December 2007.

CLOSING THE GAPS

14. (SBU) The strong participation in the sustainability workshop suggested that Barbados has a solid foundation for future work and progress. Nevertheless, the workshop revealed that Barbados will have to step up its efforts on a number of fronts in order to meet the rising HIV/AIDS challenge. While Barbados' HIV infection rate is reported to be around 1.2 percent, a number of experts noted during the workshop that they estimate for every one reported infection another four to five that go unreported because of the stigma and discrimination attached to HIV/AIDS. Several also noted that in Barbados, a country of 270,000 people, one person gets infected with HIV every single day.

15. (SBU) While the Barbadian government, private sector, labor, and NGOs have implemented a number of programs and campaigns targeting HIV/AIDS, many workshop participants complained about the lack of coordination among the various stakeholders and poor information sharing. The absence at the workshop of the National HIV/AIDS Commission, the government's lead agency charged with coordination and information dissemination, was the most visible example of these problems. Similarly, two years into the Workplace Education Program, local companies are only now beginning to discuss and share their best practices.

16. (SBU) According to some participants in the workshop, another key weakness in Barbados' efforts against HIV is funding. Although many speakers at the workshop called for

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HIV/AIDS workplace programs to be locally owned, few companies have come forward with their own funding. Among the noteworthy exceptions are the Fairmont Hotel, Goddard Enterprises Inc., and Scotiabank. The workshop discussions revealed that many Barbadian employers automatically default to seeking funding from the government and international donors, rather than committing their own resources. Even the government is not immune. According to the Ministry of Labour and Civil Service Permanent Secretary Carston Simmons, he recently spoke with ILO Director General Juan Somavia to press for continued funding for the Workplace Education Program.

17. (SBU) In addition to a lack of resources, Workplace Education Program's coordinator Arlene Husbands also pointed to a lack of commitment on the part of the companies. According to Husbands, only six Barbadian companies have adopted workplace policies on HIV/AIDS. Another two companies are working on such policies. Moreover, some of the companies that have adopted HIV/AIDS policies have couched them in what one participant described as the "safer-sounding life threatening diseases" category. Representatives of the companies that have adopted active workplace HIV/AIDS education programs also complained about difficulties in obtaining employee buy-in and keeping the workplace peer educators motivated.

18. (SBU) Despite these problems, the Sustainability Plan developed during the workshop represents a good roadmap for future efforts. The key will be follow-through, and in this regard, Barbados is blessed with a number of leaders who have made the fight against HIV/AIDS their priority and who may be able to breathe the much needed energy into Barbados' efforts. Among them is Dr. Carol Jacobs, Chair of the National HIV/AIDS Commission and Chair of the Board of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria; Colin Brewer, President of Barbados' AIDS Foundation; and the AIDS Foundation's Executive Director, Juliette Bynoe-Sutherland.

Comment

19. (SBU) The sustainability workshop was a good first step toward mobilizing a more sustained effort in Barbados against HIV/AIDS. Both of Barbados' two dailies gave the workshop front-page and editorial coverage. To make the Workplace Education Program truly sustainable, the public attention and strong participation that the workshop attracted cannot be allowed to dissipate with time. Those already committed to the fight against HIV/AIDS will also have to find new, more effective ways of reaching the public. Otherwise, they will continue--as one participant put it--"preaching to the converted" and never succeed in turning the tide against HIV/AIDS.

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